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Sarnia - Southwestern Ontario's underrated gem

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Sarnia, Ontario. Population 73,000, picturesque, a quaint city located along the beautiful, crystal blue shores of Lake Huron. A friendly city filled with wonderful eateries and shopping, golf courses and most of all, the delicious fries under the Blue Water Bridge.

It is unfortunate that after speaking with a number of residents of South Western Ontario, Sarnia is often overlooked as a city to visit or reside in. When asked, the main reason why people did not visit the city was due to the perceived lack of liveliness that Sarnia has to offer for a city of its size.

"In 1991, there were two communities here, Sarnia and Clearwater. Murphy Road was the boundary between these two communities, it left no room to grow and sprawl out," explains Mike Bradley, Mayor of Sarnia.

With this layout, the city did not develop properly. Since then, the city of Sarnia has been working diligently to make Sarnia a lively city to live in and visit.

"Forty years ago, downtown Sarnia was the only shopping area. We have built the area around Lambton Mall and it's become quite vibrant," Mayor Bradley states regarding the development of Sarnia.

Not only has Sarnia had great economic growth over the last 10 years; strengths continue to be built for the future of Lambton County. The economy will be further improved with the opening of the new business park, located near Sarnia's airport. Also, the opening of the new call center, Star Tech, at the Bayside Centre (formerly the Bayside Mall) created 500 more jobs for the city.

Lucas Blois, Property Manager of the Bayside Centre is thrilled about the changes the Bayside Centre has created for the downtown core.

"Bayside Centre has experienced a great revitalization that has seen new businesses and offices opened throughout the mall. Visitors to Bayside will find a variety of fun and interesting stores, as well as enormous resources in government, employment, and health services. And then, of course, during the holiday season, Bayside is simply gorgeous. It is a feast for the eyes to simply stroll through our beautifully appointed and decorated concourse, to greet friends, or to enjoy such amenities as the food court or the Lambton Gallery. We are proud to be at the centre of the new downtown," stated Blois.

Long-term job creation is strategic for the city of Sarnia. This also has an effect on Lambton College, which Bradley feels is vital to the "economic development of our community."

As for the downtown core of Sarnia, big box companies are not part of the future. In the 1970s and 1980s, millions of dollars were put into the downtown for development. In the last few years, the City of Sarnia has strategically invested their money where there will be direct payback. The Imperial Theatre is thriving, and current construction on the corner of Front and George Street, where the old Sarnia Tavern used to be, will be developed into 4 loft apartments and retail stores.

"It's a good idea where the sector is moving," Bradley states about the development of the downtown core.

Another interesting fact, which came to light, was ten years ago, Sarnia was named one of the top 10 cities to live in by Chatelaine Magazine. It was a fact that Sarnia was one of the most difficult places to get people to leave. The city received this achievement due to the large number of volunteers in the area. Presently, Sarnia has a number of advantages to make it a top city to live in. The skilled workforce, quality of life, the Sarnia Sports and Entertainment Centre, the new YMCA, 27 golf courses, the developing surrounding communities, Lake Huron and access to the United States are only some examples.

Darlene Lavergne, a 23 year resident of Sarnia, is impressed by the quality of life and supports Mayor Bradley's claims. "Sarnia is a perfect sized community with the perfect balance of nature and city. City council has done a wonderful job with continued improvements," states Ms. Lavergne.

Sarnia has been a community since 1857 and a city since 1914, where in the early 1900's its original name was the Imperial City. Sarnia is also the home of Canada's second Prime Minister, Sir Alexander Mackenzie. Mayor Mike Bradley invites you to come to Sarnia and make your own judgments. He can continually make his point but experiencing it for yourself may convince you. This time of year, you can enjoy the beautiful Christmas lights down by the water, the great eateries and shopping, or just the overall experience. Sarnia; definitely an underrated gem nestled in South Western Ontario.

For more information regarding any of the content in this story, visit www.city.sarnia.on.ca or www.baysidecentre.ca

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